

Board: JFK's autopsy records

WASHINGTON (AP) — Records of the 1963 autopsy performed on John F. Kennedy are incomplete, and the doctors who conducted it undermined the integrity of their work by trying to protect "the privacy and the sensibilities of the president's family," a government review board says.

In a modern-day look at issues that have given rise to decades of speculation, the Assassination Records Review Board says it is able to finally answer the question about what Navy doctor James Humes did with notes taken during the autopsy and his first draft of the autopsy report.

Previously, Dr. Humes, of the Bethesda

Naval Center and one of three autopsy doctors, confirmed that he tossed autopsy papers, some stained with Kennedy's blood, into the fireplace at his home while writing the report. But it was unclear exactly what he had burned.

"Under oath, Dr. Humes, finally acknowledged under persistent questioning, in testimony that differs from what he told the Warren Commission, that he had destroyed both his notes taken at the autopsy and the first draft of the autopsy report," the board said.

Dr. Humes' 248-page testimony is among more than 3,000 pages of medical docu-

ments released by the board last week. The records also include an affidavit from a witness who claims another autopsy doctor's notes disappeared. And in testimony to the board, photographer John T. Stringer questioned whether the pictures he took at a "supplemental autopsy" of Kennedy's brain are the ones preserved at the National Archives.

The board was created by Congress in 1992 to accumulate and release all records about the Nov. 22, 1963 assassination, in recognition that speculation about an assassination conspiracy would grow as long as some records were hidden from the

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missing notes, photos

public.

"Although the professionals who participated in the creation and the handling of the medical evidence may well have had the best of intentions in not publicly disclosing information — protecting the privacy and the sensibilities of the president's family — the legacy of such secrecy ultimately has caused distrust and suspicion," the board said in a statement.

"There have been shortcomings that have led many to question not only the completeness of the autopsy records of President Kennedy, but the lack of a prompt and complete analysis of the records by the

Warren Commission."

Among the shortcomings was confusion about what exactly Dr. Humes burned and why. Dr. Humes told the board that some years ago he visited a museum where a guide pointed out what were alleged to be bloodstains on the chair Abraham Lincoln was seated on when he was killed.

"I thought this was the most macabre thing I ever saw in my life," Dr. Humes testified. So when he noticed Kennedy's bloodstains on the autopsy papers, "I said, 'Nobody's going to ever get these documents. I'm not going to keep them, and nobody else is ever going to get them.'"